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ABSTRACT

Noting that some public, school, law, academic, and special libraries have adopted marketing as a management tool, this paper begins by discussing marketing principles as defined by the American Marketing Association (AMA). Librarians are advised to center their marketing activities around what is known as the "4 P's" of marketing: Product, Price, Promotion, and Place. Other "P words" which libraries need to consider include Public Policy, Politics, and most importantly, People. It is argued that knowing one's patron/customer is not only the basis for good marketing, but it will determine success or failure for all institutions in the 1990s. It is predicted that the 1990s will test the skills of marketers as resources become scarcer and consumers more diverse in their interests and more particular about what they will purchase. It is concluded that librarians will need to have a clear understanding of their community's diverse needs in order to market their services successfully in the future. (MAB)

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MARKETING:

Putting People in the Process

by

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MARKETING: Putting People in the Process

by Anthony Leisner

Marketing as a management tool is the newest business school discipline. The 1980s welcomed this newcomer as a way of reacting to evermore diverse groups of consumers and their demands for greater value and service. The 1990s will test the skills of these providers as resources become scarcer and consumers more diverse in their interests and more particular about what they will pay for and use.

The business sector has long used marketing fundamentals to improve their reach and efficiency, and in the latter half of the decade the tax-exempt sector began to adopt many of these techniques for their own benefit. What follows is an attempt to reinforce those who are engaged in marketing, and to familiarize those who are not, with the basic concerns of marketing.

During the Last Decade

The first White House Conference on Library and Information Services (WHCLIS) identified many of the challenges facing libraries in the decade ahead. It brought together people from diverse backgrounds and locations to share the problems and solutions to these challenges. WHCLIS marked the beginning of a new era of pro-active librarianship and the adoption of many new management philosophies that would require widespread dissemination and on-going education.

In 1984, the Public Library Association (PLA), a division of the American Library Association, held a Frontiers Conference on Public Library Marketing in Madison, Wisconsin. The attendees were mandated to return to their home states and implement educational programs for their respective states. At the same time, PLA was providing the first programs on marketing at annual conferences. These quickly became among the most popular programs offered by PLA, drawing standing room only audiences of four to six hundred librarians and trustees.

School, law, academic, and special library professionals began holding programs and producing articles about marketing, and it became clear that marketing was becoming entrenched as a management tool for the modern librarian in the '80s. Public library systems in San Diego, Denver, and Los Angeles County hired full-time marketing directors whose jobs encompassed the whole spectrum of marketing and went well beyond the previous role of just public relations. The library community has been searching for the magic formula that would finally enable it to convey the value of the profession and its services to supporters and users of libraries. Marketing offered a key to unlocking that formula.

Is There a Magic Formula?

The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines marketing as follows: "Marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives." This definition suggests that hard work and commitment rather than magic is far closer to the success formula for libraries.

The key word in this definition is *exchanges*. All institutions work with limited, or "scarce," resources. For new services or products to be added, a re-allocation of existing staff or funds is required unless the new service can be exchanged for new sources of funding.

However noble the conviction, no institution can be all things to all people and still deliver high quality. Staff and financial resources will be stretched too thin to accomplish more than minimal service for the users.

The "P" Words

The AMA definition starts with the process of planning. In fact, marketing is loaded with "P" words. The core of marketing action in the commercial world is the group known as the "4 P's" of marketing. These are: Product, Price, Promotion, and Place.

Product is interchangeable with service where service is the primary role.

Price is that which the user willingly exchanges in order to obtain that product or service. This is far more complex than it first appears to most tax-supported institutions. Beyond the tax dollars libraries charge, users pay

when they spend time coming to a library in an out-of-the-way location, at inconvenient hours, can't find what they expected to find, or when a competing source provides superior service.

Promotion is a combination of personal selling, public relations and advertising. It requires a thorough knowledge of the community and the institution as well as a detailed plan.

Place, which is called distribution in the AMA definition, refers to the location and attributes of the building and other service outlets.

Other "P" words used in tax-exempt marketing include Public Policy, Politics, and People. It is easy to envision a well priced and promoted product that is conveniently available but public policy or political considerations make it impractical. Many libraries have split over the issue of popular video versus only educational educational offerings for this very reason. This is just one area where marketing in tax-exempt institutions is different.

A new service can be too successful. Because budgets are usually set and inflexible for the year, no provision for increased demand during the budget year exists. Demand many swamp the ability to deliver, and frustrated customers will think twice about coming back for other new services.

No incentives exist for doing the job extremely well and a penalty may be implied if the result is an increased work load. Managers of libraries usually have no training in marketing or the supervision of marketing functions and they must learn on the job.

Businesses have many choices about their offerings and need not consider social value over profit, although good marketing requires meeting value needs as well as shareholder needs. Libraries are very much social services in their purpose, and profit plays no role. This however does not negate the need for efficient allocation of scarce resources as a goal of all conduct.

People--librarians, trustees, paraprofessionals, and volunteers--who work in libraries can make the most difference of all the "P's." Without skilled professional librarians, a library is only a building full of books and other media. It is these professionals that comprise the service component and it is their ability to work with people of all backgrounds and cultures that distinguishes all great libraries.

Putting People In The Process

The patron, yet another "P"--and now a rather outdated word for customer or user--should be the focus of all marketing activities. *Know your customer* is not only the basis for good marketing but will determine success or failure for all institutions in the '90s. Providing the appropriate mix of product, service, and delivery requires the cooperation of each person connected with libraries. This will mean new efforts to understand both the demographic changes and the values of customers.

Our society is increasingly becoming more diverse in its ethnic, racial, and religious composition. The needs of newcomers to the community will be far different. Librarians will need a fresh understanding of community needs and survey methods as well as an understanding of the data gathered and its implications. New methods for promoting awareness to new diverse users will be needed. These new groups must be represented on the staff, boards, and in the planning process.

The marketing implications point to changes in products, services, place of delivery and promotion. The benefits are increased usage, awareness, funding, and customer staisfaction. Where business measures success in profit dollars, libraries utilize value. The community as a whole pays for the library. Is the community better off at the end of the year for having a library? Did more people use the library's services and did they leave satisfied? Did new readers or older persons have their special needs met better than last year because their needs were better understood? These are the "bottom line" for libraries.

Getting Started

Marketing activities in libraries are driven by the mission statement. Each implementation must be directed toward the achievement of the mission. A mission statement that implies that the library will serve everyone's needs all the time is not real. It ignores economic and human resource limitations and is an assurance that the result will be mediocre service. A great research library will not be noted for its high circulation of best sellers. Understand your customer base and tailor the mission statement to meet the

needs of the greatest number while maintaining high levels of satisfaction. Then, annual goals that enable the library to measure progress toward achievement of mission can be put in place, followed by the application of the marketing "P's."

Goals measurement will determine success by tracking new or changed product, places, promotion, and pricing and the effect they have on circulation, in-library use, reference, children's services or other criteria. A mission statement is qualitative: Goals are quantitative.

What's Ahead

Many schools of library education are closing just as the need for information professionals is growing. Librarians are leaving the public sector and setting up for-profit information services. To reverse this trend, marketing techniques will have to be applied to emphasize the value of the librarian and not just the library.

To make better use of limited staff, the library will need to become more self-service oriented. More face-out shelving, better signs written in the customers' language, and perhaps even self-service check-out will enable professionals to focus on the customers who need the specialized help that librarians provide.

The polarity will continue to widen between readers and non-readers and haves and have-nots. Funding will continue to be troublesome and new efforts will have to be pursued to create endowments and foundations that will benefit from marketing directed at givers.

Libraries will need articulate spokespersons to communicate with other tax-supported bodies. Police departments do not easily see the connection between high literacy and low crime rates. They often compete for the tax dollars as do school districts where the public library is often the only after-school library.

An active marketing program targeting the various constituencies of customers, supporters, funders, and regulators will enable the library to emerge from the '90s intact and vibrant. Setting out a clear mission statement with measurable goals and a plan to achieve them will take time and effort, but the rewards will be improved positioning in the community as a vital resource with the appropriate support.

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